implementing the programme if ethanol is made available by the sugar industry at reasonable rates on a sustained basis. The oil marketing companies have invited tenders for procuring ethanol for the EBP in terms of the Gazette Notification No. 705(E) dated 27.10.2004 and the bids received are being evaluated. To ensure the sustained supply of adequate ethanol at reasonable prices to the refining industry, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas have proposed a draft MoU to the Indian Sugar Mills Association. The draft is under discussion.

(c) It is not Government but the assured availability of ethanol at reasonable prices to petroleum refining industry that is the main constraint. Moreover, sugarcane is not grown all over the country. The programme is, therefore, initially being implemented in sugarcane growing States and adjoining areas.

Stock of petroleum products

4290. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) the normal stock of petroleum and petroleum products held by the oil companies in the country;

(b) whether this stock has come down anytime during the last three years; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The total crude oil and major product holding capacity with the oil companies provided for a weighted average cover for 61 days on consumption basis and 85 days on net import basis during 2003-04. The inventories have remained more or less within the above range and there was no significant drop of inventories.

(c) Does not arise in view of (a) and (b) above.

Hiring of tankers by IOC and other oil companies for import of crude oil

4291. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have granted permission to Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) to hire tankers for importing crude;